

A BATTLE *for* LIFE AGAINST *the* SILENT MAFIA.

Italian Secret Society Has Decried Death of Father Antonio Cerutti; a Gentle Old Priest, Because He Has Shielded His Congregation From Its Vengeance.

A GENTLE old priest, lovingly doing his appointed work among his flock in a little township in the heart of Pennsylvania, is fighting a silent battle for his life against the dread power of the Mafia.

He is Father Antonio Cerutti, once of Florence. The scene of the grim, silent battle between the priest and his little knot of devoted followers and the most vengeful secret society of robbers and assassins in the world is Carbondale, one of the line of ordinarily peaceful, workaday little townships that lie along the Lackawanna valley.

Practically unaided by the police, Father Cerutti has for ten months, by day and night, sustained only by the sense of an exalted purpose, battled with the forces of the Mafia, meeting craft and cunning with the tact and acumen of a high intelligence. And in every hour of these ten months, from the night that he effected the capture of the ruffian and bully, a local agent of the Mafia's head center in New York, who had demanded money on pain of death, his life has hung by a single hair.

He knows that the flat of the Mafia, immovable and unalterable as the stars, that he shall first be marked with the sign of the cross and must then die, has gone forth: he realizes that, save for the devotion of one stalwart, brave man, Joseph Ceupa, he stands alone.

"And yet, sir," he says, with a smile, radiating a quaint humor, "I am by the providence of God alive, my face is unmarked by the cross, and I am unharmed."

He knows that Joseph Ceupa, master of all the secrets of the Mafia, matching cunning against cunning and device against device, stands as a bulwark between him and the stilettoes of his enemies, and that did Joseph fall he would be left defenseless.

Helpless Against Mafia Wiles

"For you see, the men of the Protective Society of St. Joseph, every one of whom would shed the last drop of blood in my defense," says Father Antonio, "are helpless in machinations against the assassins whom the Mafia sent down here to rob and tyrannize my people. They are simple, honest fellows, who came from the farms and the seashore, and who, working in the coal mines or on the railroads, have no thought save to earn bread for their little ones."

The story of this drama, watched with a feverish intensity of interest by the people of every town along the valley, really begins in the November of last year, when there floated through the little colony fearsome whispers of the appearance of five olive-skinned men with black hair, fierce black eyes, and the earrings that mark the professional Italian cut-throat, who, visiting the houses of the laborers at night, had demanded money, and in doing so, suggestively fingered a stiletto. When they vanished after one night's work the colony was \$200 the poorer.

The thirteen hundred people comprising Father Cerutti's flock in his Church of Mt. Carmel are divided into two sections. Of these the minority of 300 come from the province of Reggio, which has given many sons to the Mafia. The majority of the remainder come from the county of Catanzaro, in Calabria.

Father Cerutti heard of the raid and discovered that the money had been taken from the people of the Reggio district.

All these people questioned by him swore with feverish enthusiasm that they had paid money voluntarily for the benefit of their fellow-townsmen lying ill in the hospitals of New York.

Father Cerutti looked among his flock, found the man he wanted in Ceupa, took him into consultation, and waited for the next sign of the Mafia. He knew that the thriving, industrious little colony had been

marked by the organization for constant robbery and spoliation.

Men Robbed, Women Insulted

He had not long to wait. On a December night agents of the Mafia swooped down upon Carbondale and a little group of surrounding villages. And with the rising of the morning sun came a tale of horror to appall the bravest heart; a tale of men and women held up at the point of the revolver and forced to give up all that they had; of homes invaded; the husbands, brothers, fathers turned into the street by the burly, black-browed ruffians of the Mafia; of wives and sisters subjected to insult and indignity.

To the local police presently floated rumors of the foray. With bulldog directness they made the usual effort at investigation, only to find their way blocked by the stone wall of a trembling, frightened denial on the part of the victims.

Then it was that Father Cerutti, in earnest of a resolution he had taken, called a dozen of the men of his congregation together and laid the foundation of the organization of defense, to be known as the Protective Society of St. Joseph.

"My sons," said the priest, "the time has come when we must arise for the defense of our homes against the enemies of the honest men of our race. To appeal to the Anglo-Saxon police is, you see, useless. They are honest and willing, but they can do nothing with our people against the Mafia. The detection and punishment of our criminals must be with us. We must meet Italian cunning with Italian cunning."

And there and then the Protective Society was formed, each man present registering a solemn oath to give up his life if need be in the detection of the criminals and the protection of the homes of his fellow-countrymen.

By tacit consent it was Joseph Ceupa, the soldier, who organized the forces.

With Their Own Weapons

The Mafia in New York heard, and issued the first challenge. Twenty agents, supplied with money, went to Carbondale, and, with the aid of a padrone, got work in the mines or on the railroad, and began the battle. Ceupa was al-

ready in command of their names and identities.

Frank Martino, holding up a pallid, trembling boy at the point of a revolver in the darkness of Fairview street, felt the pistol dashed from his grasp, and wheeled round to see the little figure of the priest confronting him, and in the next moment Father Cerutti had seized him. Ceupa and four other shadowy figures came seemingly out of space, and Martino lay bound and gagged on the ground. Speedy was his fate; within a week he was on his way to the State penitentiary, there to serve four years and nine months of imprisonment with hard labor.

Came one night a Mafia agent to a house from which the father of the family was absent. And even as he hammered fiercely at the door a shot rang out from a clump of trees by the roadside. He fell, desperately wounded, to be carried away by mysterious hands.

The battle had begun in earnest, with the first two blows to the credit of the vigilance men.

"Wait and see," was the word sent down to Carbondale by the head centers of the Mafia in response to a wild appeal for further instructions from the local agent.

Santo Criscara, who in nine years of activity as a professional agent of the Mafia had never even been under

suspicion, held up six homes one night in January, and reaped a harvest of \$50.

Foresco Matzogall, John Cambo and two more, following this action with mechanical precision on the following night, had \$200 to forward to headquarters at New York on their return.

They rejoiced in the thought that they would not now have to pay with wounds and stabs for their non-success. When, in the saloons that night they flourished rolls of bills and in blatant boasting talked of their triumph, they recked not of the laborer with a black patch over his eye, who lay, seemingly drunk, in a corner of the room. And only did they realize the truth when four hours later Ceupa appeared at their bedside, revolver in hand, behind him a group of the Carbondale police, and dragged them from their beds to jail.

Once more Pennsylvania justice was swift; Criscari five years and nine months; Matzogall and Cambo, each four years and six months, was the grim story presently forwarded to the Mafia officers in New York.

"The priest and that accursed Ceupa will beat us!" said the council of the Mafia.

"Once shake the belief of the Italians in the invincibility and invulnerability of the Mafia our power

will be gone forever. Ceupa must be killed. The face of the priest must be marked with the cross. He, too, must die!"

This, according to Ceupa, groping around the haunts of the Mafia in every kind of disguise, was the order now issued.

Soon twenty-five more Mafia agents began work on the railroad. This time John Costa was chosen the local leader. Thrice was Ceupa shot at in the darkness, and each time escaped unhurt.

The end of April approached before the Mafia struck its first blow at the devoted priest. Father Cerutti entering the shadows of the Fairview road leading to his home, at midnight, after leaving the bedside of a dying woman, was followed by a shadowy presence that grew nearer and nearer with each step. And when it seemed that the pursuer was close on his prey three other figures, watching from the other side of the street, jumped out and gave chase to him. The man was fleet of foot and was lost in the woods.

It might have been a mere matter of coincidence that John Costa the following night fell into a fierce quarrel with Salvatore Carriccio, fired two shots at him and vanished. For many weeks Carriccio lay in a hospital with a bullet wound in his leg. And then, Costa having fled to



FATHER CERUTTI'S CHURCH, OF MOUNT CARMEL, AT CARBONDALE PA

Italy, Carriccio was released. Every effort to induce him to admit that he was the man who had followed Father Cerutti had been fruitless.

For Revenge Upon the Priest

The whole purpose of the Mafia was now bent upon one object, revenge. And here the familiar methods of the organization were brought into play. There was a lull of four weeks more, and Father Cerutti, who had been reading by his library table, suddenly looking up, saw by the light of the lamp a figure crouching on the inside of a window in the rear room. Lifting the lamp he stepped into the inner room, and as he crossed the threshold the figure leaped through the open window and was gone.

This was the signal for a guard upon Father Cerutti's home. Two armed men, one at the rear door, one at the front door, watched over the sleep of the priest.

Ceupa, dodging flying shots in dark streets, steadily pursued his campaign. Every newcomer in the Italian colony was watched and questioned, and his replies being unconvincing, driven out.

Came July and the approach of the Fourth, bringing the annual picnic of the Church of Mt. Carmel. Father Cerutti, in his innocent delight in the approach of what is to him the great event of the year, had perhaps momentarily forgotten the Mafia. Not so Ceupa. It was at the picnic, he reasoned, that the men of the Mafia, never sleeping, would make their next attack; for then Father Cerutti would be surrounded by only women and children. He noticed, also, that certain men, whom he suspected were agents of the Mafia, had of late evinced a remarkable fondness for the clump of woods half a mile in the rear of Father Cerutti's home.

Ceupa recalled the existence of a cave in a bank of trees a hundred yards in the interior of the woods, and for two nights, hidden in underbrush, watched. By his side were four chosen aides.

The night of July 2 brought the crisis. With the setting of the sun seven men, apparently coming from as many different points, crept into the clearing outside the cave. In the center of the group was one who appeared to be the leader.

"I heard Father Cerutti's name mentioned in fierce anger. I saw the men step out, saw them throw the stilettoes on the ground and raise their hands to the sky, and

then I knew that they were swearing to take Father Cerutti's life," said Ceupa, in giving the story to this newspaper.

There was a sharp whistle, a rush, a fusillade of revolver shots, and one trembling prisoner was in the hands of Ceupa. The rest had escaped. No weapon was found on the Mafia man, and there being no evidence on which he could be even held, he was released.

Thrice since that night has Father Cerutti been followed to his home—trailed there by the vengeance of the Mafia, his protectors trailing the trailers, and firing a warning shot as they approached too near.

Only two weeks ago the Mafia played another card. Father Cerutti, in one of those moments of incaution which seem inevitably to affect the man in deadly peril, had chosen a new route across lots to his home. As he approached the shadows of the trees a light step behind him brought him to a stop, and, as before, he wheeled around to see a man close upon him, his hand grasping something in his pocket.

Saved by His Faithful Guard

Then did Father Cerutti, realizing that the Mafia had gotten him at last, shout for help. There were answering shouts from the road. The man turned, ran for his life to the woods, yet he could not get out of the range of his pursuers, and he ran on, staggering with exhaustion, until he tumbled head foremost over a fallen tree. The razor found in his pocket will help to convict him at his trial, at Scranton, for assault.

And thus this strange war of darkness, in all its features unlike anything of the kind ever before seen in the country, goes on until justice, represented by Father Antonio Cerutti and his devoted aide, Joseph Ceupa, shall have triumphed, or the Mafia once again has given convincing evidence that it is, indeed, invulnerable to law.

"And you see, as I told you in the beginning," said Father Cerutti gently tapping the shoulder of the writer, "I am still safe and still unhurt in spite of their machinations. Perhaps it is given us to prove that this band of brigands and assassins which we know by the name of the Mafia can be fought and beaten. Perhaps they will succeed in their purpose to disfigure me and get my life. Well, then, there is one old priest less in the world, and the good God will reward me in His own way."

Oyama a Modern Caesar

It is a diverting fancy to compare the heroes of our own day with the world figures of antiquity and to search for Homers, Euclids and Caesars among our men of letters, science and war.

An easy morning's work, with some slight risk of sudden death, made George Dewey, an elderly and obscure commodore, "the Nelson of America," and the laying of a railroad across the sands of Egypt brought Kitchener, a friendly British brigadier, into comparison with Scipio Africanus Major.

And today amateur military critics are comparing Field Marshal Marquis Oyama, the Japanese commander-in-chief, with Caesar, Alexander, Hannibal, Frederick the Great, Napoleon and Von Moltke.

He seems to possess, in truth, the characteristics of several of these men—the determination of Caesar, the ambition of Alexander and Von Moltke's marvelous calm.

But more than any other hero to whom he has been likened in any article that has reached us he resembles that stupendous figure, Alaric the Goth. Alaric, the historians tell us, was a savage. He was unacquainted with the plays of Aeschylus. He seldom bathed. He ate, no doubt, with his knife. If a slave offended him he slew that slave and thought no more of it. His dress was primitive and his language uncouth. He was innocent of belief in shirts and stove-pipe hats.

Beside the highly civilized Romans of the day he seemed a helpless barbarian. The very name of Goth has come down to us as a synonym for a brutal, sensual, cruel, iconoclast—an impolite, ungentlemanly fellow—a stranger to the true, the good, and the beautiful.

And yet Alaric, though a savage, was a better man than his vanquished foes. He protected their women in an age when the women of the conquered were part of the victor's loot; he stood in awe before the murals of Rome and marveled at its learning, and when his slaying was done he tried to give the ancient city a decent government and abandoned the task only after he had found it impossible to unearth a Roman honest enough to be governor.

Oyama is just such a man. Twenty years ago, finding his wife careless of his honor, he killed her with his own hands.

Fifty years ago, a barbarian, he gazed upon a rifle cannon for the first time. Born in old Japan, he had reached man's estate before he realized that there were nations that knew more of science and art and war than his own. With the Romans decency had become purely academic. With the Goths of Alaric it was a principle ever present and real.

Honorius, the Roman general, fancied himself the chosen instrument of civilization, but assumed no responsibility except to bear his honors grandly. Alaric saw that progress and dominion meant unceasing fidelity, real as well as theoretical, to the highest ideals of duty and honor.

That is precisely the difference between the Russians and the Japanese. The first pray to their ikons and loot their Red Cross stores. The latter know the eternal superiority of ideas over things.